

Federal Safe Routes to School program reduces child injuries by more than 40 percent in New York City

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The national Safe Routes to School (SRTS) program was funded by Congress in 2005 in an effort to create safe environments for American children to walk or bike to school. Has the program been effective? In New York City, most definitely, according to a new study conducted at Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health that evaluated the program here. Researchers found that the annual rate of injury to school-age pedestrians ages 5-19 fell 44% during the peak times for walking to school, in neighborhoods where the program was implemented. Significantly, the injury rate did not drop in parts of the city where the SRTS safety program was not in place.

Findings of the report are published online in *Pediatrics*.

The researchers analyzed [motor vehicle crash](#) data for 169,000 pedestrian injuries between 2001 and 2010 for different age groups and neighborhoods with and without SRTS interventions to assess the program's effectiveness.

Interventions for reducing pedestrian injury included new traffic and pedestrian signals, the addition of exclusive pedestrian crossing times, speed bumps, speed boards, high-visibility [crosswalks](#), and new parking regulations. More than 120 NYC schools were selected by the NYC Department of Transportation for the interventions because they had the highest rates of pedestrian injury.

The researchers created a school-travel time indicator variable to further identify crashes that occurred during days and hours when school-aged children would be traveling to or from school. This time period was defined as 7 AM to 9 AM or 2 PM to 4 PM, Monday through Friday between September and June.

"Our data show that interventions to make the built environment safer can greatly reduce injuries to children as they walk to school", says the lead author of the study, Charles DiMaggio, PhD, associate professor of Epidemiology and research director of the Center for Injury Epidemiology and Prevention at Columbia.

The Safe Routes to School program was funded through 2012, and is now in place in all 50 states at approximately 10% of elementary and secondary schools. Under the current federal transportation bill, MAP-21, the Safe Routes program will no longer have dedicated funding. It is now one of a number of possible programs eligible for funding based on state and local priorities, making it "even more important to evaluate and demonstrate the effectiveness of programs like Safe Routes to School", according to Dr. DiMaggio.

"Our study provides compelling empirical evidence that is essential to guiding policy makers," says senior author Guohua Li, MD, DrPH, Mailman School professor of Epidemiology and Anesthesiology and director of the Center for Injury Epidemiology and Prevention. "It indicates that the Safe Routes to School program has made a marked difference in improving the safety of [school](#)-age children in New York City."

Provided by Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health

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